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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the reading and study skills program at Texas Southern University which operates within the framework of the individualized prescription model. The majority of students enrolled in the program have a composite reading grade equivalent score of ten or below as measured by the Nelson-Denny Reading Test. Students are allowed to progress at their own pace once they are assigned to work through a certain individual reading packet. The students' performance is diagnosed and evaluated continuously from skill to skill and from unit to unit. Teachers monitor students' progress very closely. A minimum of 85 percent accuracy is required on all skill tests before a student is permitted to move from one unit to ancther. The units in each area progress from easy to more difficult reading levels. The materials for instructional packets come from many sources. Some materials are commercially prepared while others are developed in the reading and study skills center. A variety of trade books, magazines, newspapers, reading skills laboratories, tapes filmstrips, and films are used as resources in the development of instructional units. (WR)

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AN URBAN CENTERED READING AND STUDY SKILLS PROGRAM

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AN URBAN CENTERED READING AND STUDY SKILLS PROGRAM*

Introduction

The State of Texas designated Texas Southern University as a "Special Purpose Institution of Higher Education for Urban Programming" in June 1973. This new charge made it necessary for various departments and service centers of the University to redesign their learning programs in an effort to meet the needs of their clientele. The Reading and Study Skills Center was among those instructional entities to redesign its learning program.

The student population at Texas Southern University is more diverse now than ever, especially since the inception of the Weekend College. A large number of older students whose studies have been interrupted for various reasons, full-time employed students, parents and children from the same family, veterans, bilingual and international students constitute a large portion of the total enrollment. These students bring with

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*A Texas Southern University Faculty Research Grant provided funds to develop and implement this instructional program based on the use of individualized prescribed instructional packets at the college level. (Whittaker, 15).

a multiplicity of different academic preparations. Many of these students are in need of special reading and study skills if they are expected to make satisfactory progress academically. For the purpose of clarity, a student in need of help in developing proficient reading and study skills is identified as one who is not functioning at his reading expectency level nor has he attained a grade equivalence score of 13.0 or above in reading as measured by a standardized reading achievement test.

Related Literature

The notion of implementing instructional programs to meet individual student needs is not new in the American educational arena. As early as 1922, Washburne (14) advocated individualized instruction. Many variations of individualized instructional models have been tried during the last fifty years. (Gibbons, 3; Gronlund, 6; Heathers, 8). However, according to Hambleton (7) more individualized instructional programs were implemented during the last decade than any other period of time. Admittedly, the major efforts to implement individualized learning programs have been concentrated at the elementary grades rather than secondary and college levels. Preference seems to have been given to Individualized Prescribed Instruction (IPI) in comparison to many other instructional models predicated on meeting individual student needs. Some of the chief exponents of the IPI model are Veatch (13), Tyler (12), Wolf (16), Odom (10), Glaser (4, 5), Spodek (11), Beck and Bolvin (2).

Program Description

The Reading and Study Skills program at Texas Southern University operates within the framework of the Individualized Prescribed Instructional model. It is based on the premise that "The course design must... encompass the current prerequisities for a job,...provide students with the capability to continuously upgrade their skills after leaving the classroom so they may remain competitive in their profession. In our technological world, that means being able to "read how" as well as "to do." (Johnson, 9). The program herein described shows how goals and instructional resources are individually prescribed for the express purpose of facilitating learning and academic development of students enrolled in reading and study skills at the college level. It is mainly concerned with the formation of behavioral objectives for each skill taught, diagnosis of reading and study skills competencies of students entering the program, the assessibility of a variety of instructional materials, individual pacing and sequencing of learning materials, in additional to carefully appraising and plotting individual student performance and progress.

Student Selectivity. The majority of students enrolled in Reading and Study Skills courses at Texas Southern University who receive instruction via individual instructional packets have a composite reading grade equivalent score of 10.0 or below as measured by the Nelson-Denny Reading Test. The Nelson-Denny Reading Test scores for beginning students are made available to student advisors prior to registration each semester and summer term. Students are asked to enroll in a reading and study skills

course based on his test results. Any student whose total performance is below 13.0 on the Nelson-Denny Reading Test is so advised. Those students who score below 10.0 are administered a diagnostic instrument to determine more specifically their reading deficiencies and instructional levels. The diagnostic appraisal is made during the first week of class instruction beginning each semester and summer term. The Davis Reading Test Form 1A, Diagnostic Reading Tests and a teacher-made informal reading inventory are instruments used to make further diagnosis of students who evidence a deficit in reading skills. Data generated from these instruments are classified and categorized for instructional purposes based on skill deficiencies and levels of difficulty. This screening procedure is necessary because we must reach the students before we can advance them academically. (Bachner, 1:55). From this point on students work through individually prescribed instructional packets.

Instructional Procedures. The instructional program is divided into ~~the~~ two broad areas: 1. reading skills, and 2. study skills. Each area is further divided into units, and units are divided into skills. For example, the unit on location skills consists of previewing, skimming, scanning, using the preface and/or introduction, using table of contents, using a bibliography, using an appendix, and using the index. The various skills make up the instructional packets. Instructional packets for each unit in an area progress in levels of difficulty. A single packet contains activities designed for the mastery of a particular skill. Each packet has its own set of behavorial objectives and activities through which a student works at his own pace. The mastery of a particular skill may re-

quire several steps and activities contained within a single packet. To move from one skill to another, a student must master each step with at least 85% accuracy. In the event a student fails to score the mimimum per cent of accuracy on a skill test, he is provided with comparable exercises until the desired level of achievement is attained. The same exercise is never attempted twice. The student and teacher check the student's performance on all exercises cooperatively. The teacher is charged with the responsibility of carefully monitering each student's progress as he works through the various instructional units. Continuous diagnosis is part of the evaluation process.

Learning materials used for the total reading and study skills program are drawn from many sources. Some materials are commercially prepared while others are developed in the Reading and Study Skills Center. A variety of trade books, magazines, newspapers, reading skills laboratories, tapes, filmstrips and films are resources from which instructional units are developed. Maximum use is made of software; however, hardware is used when appropriate.

Summary

The Urban Centered Reading and Study Skills Program at Texas Southern University is based on the premise that reading skills at the college level can best be taught on an individual basis. Diagnostic measures are applied to identify students' reading deficiencies and instructional levels. Students are allowed to progress at their own pace once they are assigned to work through a certain individual reading and study skills packet. The

students' performance is diagnosed and evaluated continuously from skill to skill and unit to unit. Teachers moniter students' progress very closely. A minimum of 85% accuracy is required on all skill tests before a student is permitted to move from one unit to another. The units in each area progress from easy to more difficult reading levels. The materials for instructional packets come from a variety of sources including both commercially and teacher prepared activities.

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